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ABSTRACT

Research aimed at recognizing, encouraging, enhancing, and harnessing the skills and contributions of women in the Australian grains industry involved a number of women in Victoria in focus groups, telephone interviews, and questionnaire surveys. Results indicate that women perceived themselves as providing guidance, operational assistance, planning, health and safety functions, enterprise activities, and reliability to farm operations, and that they were available 24 hours a day. Two role categories were identified, traditional and contemporary. Women in the grains industry were generally highly educated, contributing business and administration skills, assisting in manual farm operations, earning off-farm income, and caring for the family. Women undervalued their skills and contributions and lacked the confidence and skills to be more involved. The majority of women expressed either a lack of interest in being involved or a lack of belief in their ability to impact on the agripolitical area. Approximately 27 percent of these women wanted something better and had the capabilities and determination to achieve it. Attracting these women to greater involvement in the grains industry will require, at the industry level, recognizing their capabilities; valuing their input; providing training, support such as mentors and role models, a professional work environment, and accessible, affordable childcare; and raising the profile of farming. (TD)

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Women in Grains Research Project - Extract

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In April 1997, the President of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Grains Group invited a number of women, involved in the grains industry and the VFF to meet. The Women in Grains Reference Group (WIGRG) was formed and a research project was initiated. The research was funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and conducted by Strong Consulting Group (SCG), Ballarat. The research confirmed many of the issues which were 'known' but not previously documented. Overall the research revealed that there were significant numbers of women involved in many aspects of farming, women were interested in developing skills, their level of involvement at the agripolitical level was limited and a major barrier to increased involvement by women in the industry was lack of confidence.

1. Project Objectives

The overall aim of the project was 'To recognise, encourage, enhance and harness the skills and contributions of women in the grains industry and wider community'. The research objectives included the investigation, analysis and documentation to:

- establish the current level of skills and involvement of women on farms and within their communities
- determine the desired level of involvement by women in the agripolitical and/or community areas
- evaluate the factors that allow or disallow the involvement of women on farms, in agripolitical areas and within their communities
- determine the skills women would require to assist them to become more involved in their farms and the agripolitical areas
- determine the skills women would be willing to learn to become more involved
- identify farm ownership structures that exist and where women fit into these
- analyse the level of off farm employment by women and the reasons for this
- comment on relevant literature available.

2. Project and Research Approach

To obtain the views of a typical representation of women in the grains industry a market research approach was undertaken, using focus groups, telephone interviews and questionnaires. A range of issues were considered including:

- rural isolation
- levels of literacy
- the confidence of individual women to meet as a group to openly discuss roles, responsibilities and aspirations
- the confidence in being heard with respect to making a contribution to decision making processes, both within the farm structure and the industry overall.

The research approach adopted was to ensure

- avoidance of sole comment from a gender biased group

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- opinion from a representative sample
- the use of a multi faceted research approach qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

The research involved gathering Primary Data (Primary Analysis) which provided the summary of the population surveyed. Further analysis of the Primary Data, using Cluster Analysis (Secondary Analysis) allowed general analyses and conclusions to be drawn.

3. Perception of Roles

The roles of women in the Victorian grains industry had not been adequately defined in the past, although there had been considerable speculation regarding the value of the roles played by women. It was evident that women tend to make themselves available 24 hours per day in a variety of roles. Two specific role categories were identified - traditional and contemporary.

A term consistently used by women is that of a *'GOPHER'*:

- *Guidance* and support to the partnership, family and community
- *Operational* assistance, to the farm business needs
- *Planning* and coordinating on and off farm activities
- *Health* and safety officer
- *Enterprise* activities
- *Reliability*, ie. being there.

3.1 The Traditional Role

The woman's perceived role was to 'remain within the farm gate' and be available to:

- feed the contractors, family and visitors
- clean the house, wash, iron and mend clothes
- act as a 'sounding board'
- help the children with their homework, get them to school, sport and other activities
- do the farm books and other administrative functions
- be available to 'run and grab' any time of day.
- Women who worked off farm were not well regarded, they were seen to be:
- not real farmers
- taking the jobs of younger single women within the community
- not making a valuable contribution (off farm income was often undervalued and misunderstood).

3.2 The Contemporary Role

Women in this group recognise the need to run the family farm as a business requiring strategic planning, hands on experience, and sound business acumen. The men tend to run the operational component and women pick up the planning and business management role.

The transition of women from traditional to contemporary roles is leading to an increase in the number of women attending farming groups, education and training seminars, investment sessions, marketing field days and information technology updates. This has been achieved through restructuring the traditional roles and the introduction of different solutions to ensure responsibilities are met. 'We had to make a choice, whether my skills were better utilised sewing, cleaning, ironing and washing or marketing our grain. *We decided to buy in home help and have since paid for that three times over with the achievement of better product prices'.*

4. Primary Data Analysis

Relationship Details - 96.6% of those who completed questionnaires are married.
Age Categories - 68% of the respondents are aged between 31 and 50.
Educational Standard - 85% of women have year 11 or above, 36% have a tertiary qualification..
The Farm Family Size - 58% of farms support 4 to 6 people.
Children in the Family Unit - 63 % of families have three or more children.
Farm Business Relationship - Partnership structures are significant.
Time Management - Approximately 45% of time is spent in home duties. There was a desire for more time to undertake training, work on farm for income and other activities.

Industry Affiliations - Women cited lack of time and relevant educational skills, concern with not being taken seriously and their contributions valued as the major factors limiting their involvement.
Skills Offered - The highest contributions are in the areas of business/marketing (39%) and general hand (34%). The role of carer is often overlooked.
Needs to be Addressed - There are a number of perceived barriers, the largest is stated as a lack of clearly defined roles and care of the family. A significant no comment.
Source of Farming Knowledge and Skills - Over 50% of respondents grew up on farms and quote this as their primary source of developing farming skills.

5.Secondary Data Analysis - Main Findings

The Secondary Data Analysis refined key characteristics of the Primary sample using cluster analysis. Four clusters were identified, with the characteristics shown below. The clusters represent two extreme positions with a degree of overlap on the intermediate ones.

5.1 Comments on the Cluster Analysis

Farm size does not seem to vary across the four cluster groups, each group saw the role of partner as being the most important. The better educated and younger aged groups wanted to contribute more however time was seen as a major barrier to greater involvement.
An identifier has been given to each cluster with an analysis of each group.
Cluster 1: Older Traditional - 14%
The oldest group with the lowest levels of education, perceive their role as partner, offering the skills of general hand and carer, age is the major barrier.
Cluster 2: Older Contemporary - 20%
Middle aged, well educated, participate professionally, time and role definition are the barriers.
Cluster 3: Younger Traditional - 42%
Occupy the middle ground are on the younger side of middle age, better educated than their mothers, primary care givers, business partners active in the administrative side of the farm business, lack of time is a barrier. Their belief in themselves and their level of professional involvement make them of interest.
Cluster 4: Younger Contemporary - 25%
Younger, better educated, higher than average participation in the non operating aspects of the farm business, want better things for their families, role definition is the major barrier.

Table 1

Cluster Analysis Groupings

Category	Cluster 1 Older Traditional	Cluster 2 Older Contemporary	Cluster 3 Younger Traditional	Cluster 4 Younger Contemporary
Size of Sample - #	15	22	46	27
Age - % Distribution				
31-40 years	6.7	27.3	45.7	51.9
41-50 years	26.7	45.5	50.0	40.7
51-60 years	66.7	27.3	4.3	7.4
Educational Standard Achieved: - % Distribution				
<Year 9	13.3			
Year 9	13.3			7.4
Year 10	53.3		39.1	33.3
Year 11	20.0		30.4	25.9
Year 12			30.4	25.9
Diploma		54.5		7.4
Degree		27.3		
Post Graduate Qualification		18.2		
Certificate		5.4		
Av. No. of Family Members Supported by the Farm	4.7		6.1	4.5
Average Farm size – Acres	2,829	2,977	3,512	2,979
Farm Ownership - %				
Partner	93.3	63.6	84.8	70.4
Director	6.7	22.7	6.5	18.5
Owner		22.7	10.9	18.5
Employee		4.5		3.7
Manager				11.1
Other		22.7	8.7	18.5
Skills to Offer the Business - % Distribution				
General Hand	33.0	27.0	34.0	26.0
Communications	7.0	5.0	2.0	14.0
Business/Marketing	7.0	36.0	32.0	47.0
Carer	17.0	5.0	3.0	5.0
Information Gathering		16.0	7.0	2.0
Barriers to Allow Greater Contribution - %				
Care of Family	6.7	13.6	10.9	11.1
Time	13.3	18.2	15.2	11.1
Income to Employ Help	6.7	9.1	4.3	7.4
Greater Acceptance	6.7	4.5	6.5	7.4
Definition of Roles	6.7	18.2	10.9	25.9
Age	20.0			
None	6.7	13.6	19.6	18.5

6. Research Results Against Objectives

6.1 Establish the current level of skills and involvement of women on farms and within their communities

Women involved in the grains industry are generally highly educated, approximately 36 % have a tertiary qualification.

The primary contributions women provide to the farm business include:

- care and maintenance of the family unit, ensuring support structures are in place for the farm to operate. This requires the coordination of all activities including:
  - the consideration of the need to separate the farm business from family life
  - highly developed communication skills
- contribute to the farm business through earning off farm income to allow the farm business to remain/become viable. Approximately 55% of those women surveyed earn off farm income
- business, administrative and communication skills with an increasing focus on marketing
- gather, interpret and disseminate information by accessing, various media sources and attending groups
- assist in farm operations by driving machinery, overseeing OHS issues, marketing grain and coordinating the pick up of farm requirements.

Despite the wide range of valuable skills that women bring to the family farm, *the majority of women surveyed do not have confidence in their abilities and often underestimate the contributions they make.*

6.2 Determine the desired level of involvement by women in the agripolitical and community areas

The majority of women surveyed believe they lack the ability to more actively play a role in the grains industry. There are significant numbers, who have the capabilities and/or confidence to become more involved in the farm and the grains industry overall. These women constitute 27% of the population sampled and generally come from the categories -

- Older Contemporary
- Younger Traditional
- Younger Contemporary.

There is a core group of women who want to play a greater part in shaping the development of the grains industry and who appear to have the determination and abilities to rise above these barriers. Each group has slightly different reasons for wanting to become more active but the core drivers appear to be:

- a higher level of education and knowing what to do
- age - being younger, questioning more and wanting something better
- greater involvement in the overall farm management
- the likelihood of professional arrangements with respect to farm ownership
- their vision for the future of farming.

6.3 The factors that allow or disallow the involvement of women on farms, in agripolitical areas and within their communities

The majority of women surveyed indicated time was the major barrier preventing them from becoming more involved, their days commence at around 7am and end between 10 & 11pm. They are working almost the equivalent of two full time positions with very little personal support or time to themselves

Care of the family, particularly children, is the first priority for most women. Access to childcare is a major barrier. Women drive large distances to enable their children to participate in childcare.

Confidence is another barrier. Many women are aware of this yet feel unable within their situation to address the issue. Many feel, 'it is better to go with the flow rather than upset the apple cart'.The following issues are a reality for many women on grain farms:

- being the only woman at an all male gathering
- being reminded of the traditional belief that a woman's role is in the home, ' haven't you got enough to do at home?'
- not being invited to accompany the 'men off the farm'
- negative responses towards women from farm agents, financial institutions and domineering family members

- lack of knowledge in the operational side of the farm business prevents questions being asked, for fear of ridicule.

6.4 Determine the skills women would require to assist them to become more involved in their farms and the agripolitical areas

Women require acknowledgement and feedback that they are of value and their contributions are a necessary component of the management team. If women were reassured of their capabilities, skills and talents they would develop greater confidence and be able to address issues that are currently being addressed by a male dominated industry.

Many women expressed a desire to learn more about the following areas:

- grain marketing and options
- information technology and the appropriate software to maximise efficiencies of the farm business
- technical information related to long term sustainable agriculture
- being informed and aware of the effects of long term chemical use
- business practice and professional skills in the areas of:
  - conducting and chairing meetings
  - setting agendas
  - lifting the profile of farmers so farming is seen as a profession requiring technical knowledge and multiskilling
  - developing business plans and strategic direction for the farm business.

Women want to develop skills in the areas listed above, but see it necessary to do so, in an environment that encourages both women and men to learn, explore, make mistakes and form useful networks.

The most discussed reason for enhanced skill development was to provide better support to the family farm business structure.

Factors which could allow more women to be actively involved in the grains industry:

- precisely defining roles for women
- prioritisation of tasks, roles and responsibilities, including consideration of buying in labour to do less skilled work thereby freeing up the business partner to perform more productive roles
- the introduction and implementation of a formalised approach to the strategic planning of the farm business, especially the ability to asses risk
- the opportunity for women to support one another and their business partners in a net working forum. Women who attended the focus groups were grateful for the opportunity to discuss farming on a professional basis.

6.5 Determine the skills women would be willing to learn to become more involved

Women are willing to learn all of the skills outlined above when the time is right and when they feel able to contribute to the farm business. The major factors mentioned/discussed include:

- when their children are older they will have more time to focus on the farm business
- reducing farm debt will enable women to work less off farm and spend more time on farm
- altering farm ownership structure and defining their roles.

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6.6 Identify farm ownership structures that exist and where women fit into these.

Table 2
Position of Women with respect to farm business and land ownership

Position with Respect to Farm Business					
Partner	Director	Owner	Employee	Manager	Other
119	19	24	4	5	17
Position with Respect to the Farm Business Ownership					
Partner	Director	Owner	Employee	Manager	Other
110	18	17	1	0	22
Position with Respect to Farm LandOwnershipStructure					
Individual	Leased	Company	Trust	Joint	Other
32	8	17	21	76	10

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6.7 Analyse the level of off farm employment by women and the reasons for this

55% of the women surveyed work off farm for income, the reasons are varied and include:

- the need to supplement the farm income. (Statistics by Neil Clarke and Associates suggest that 70% of farms in Victoria are not viable, requiring additional injections of income.)
- keeping skill levels up dated in case the need arises to return to work full time
- social interaction and time out from the family farm. Unlike most other employees or business operators there is no break between work and home, they are one and the same.

6.8 Comment on relevant literature available

One significant finding is the fact that 36% of the women surveyed in the grains industry have tertiary qualifications, although not necessarily in agriculture. Sue Kilpatrick's work 'Change Training and Farm Profitability', states that 'The farm businesses which have agricultural qualifications present in the management team have an average (mean) gross operating surplus in 1993/1994 of $85,024 compared to $58,768 for other farm businesses.'

A second finding requiring further interpretation is the number of women involved in the various grain industry sectors as documented by the 1996 Victorian Women's budget, produced by the Victorian Department of Justice - Office of Rural Affairs. The gender breakdown by department clearly shows that as at June 1996 there were 50 boards and committees with a total of 893 members including 124 women (14%).

7. Conclusions

Family farms exhibit a strong sense of family values, an apparent low divorce rate and the desire to improve the lot of the farm family. There is a growing involvement of contemporary farm women with farm management. Understanding these characteristics is the key to developing strategies to engender growth in the participation by women in the grains industry.

The role of women on the family farm is commonly perceived as 'Gopher', with a perception that women are available 24 hours per day. Two specific role categories were identified, the traditional and contemporary role.

Women involved in the grains industry are generally highly educated contributing a diverse range of skills to the farm, including business and administration skills, assisting in manual farm operations, as well as caring for the family and earning off farm income. Women undervalue their skills and the contribution they make and lack the confidence and skills to be more involved.

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The majority of women surveyed expressed either a lack of interest in being involved or a lack of belief in their ability to impact on the agripolitical area. There is a core of women, approximately 27%, of various backgrounds who want something better, have the capabilities and the determination to achieve this outcome. The factors motivating these women are based on a higher level of education, age and the 'need for something better', greater involvement in farm management, the likelihood of professional farm ownership arrangements and their vision for the future of farming.

The key issues in attracting these women to have a greater involvement in the grains industry, include ensuring, at the industry level, that the capabilities of women are recognised, their input valued; support, mentors, role models; having a professional environment to work in; accessible, affordable childcare; appropriate, accessible and relevant training; and raising the profile of farming.

Women have indicated they are willing to undertake skill development especially in the areas of grain marketing, information technology, technical information relating to sustainable agriculture, chemical usage, meeting procedures and business and strategic planning.

Skill development needs to be available in an environment that encourages both men and women to learn and make useful networks. In areas where women feel they do not have the technical or farm management knowledge they need a supportive environment where they can ask questions, and gain knowledge without the fear of ridicule. Women indicated they wanted a supportive environment to learn in so that they would feel comfortable being part of the main stream activities.

55% of women work off farm for income, to supplement farm income, keep their skills updated and social interaction. There are a number of women who would be involved full time on the farm, if the farm was financially viable.

Women are under represented in professional roles at a senior level in industry associations in most sectors of the Australian economy. With respect to the primary sector the position is worse than the overall average and the Victorian grains industry sector is lower than the primary sector overall.

Acknowledgment

Grains Research and Development Corporation, Women in Grains Reference Group Situation Analysis, (1997) Strong Consulting Group, Ballarat.